

New Organization Arises from Iowa Legal Aid Merger

Legal Services Corporation of Iowa and the Legal Aid Society of Polk County merged effective January 1, 2003. The new organization is called Iowa Legal Aid.

- The Legal Aid Society of Polk County was formed in 1951 to provide legal assistance to the county's low-income residents.
- Legal Services Corporation of Iowa was formed in 1977 to serve the legal needs of low-income Iowans in the rest of the state.

The merger is part of nationwide movement to consolidate states' legal aid.

- The federal Legal Services Corporation, which provides funding for legal aid across the country, has asked groups to merge in order to provide more effective, efficient services.
- Legal aid organizations in the majority of states have merged in the past five years.

Iowa Legal Aid will have a statewide mandate.

- Iowa Legal Aid provides services to low-income people in all 99 Iowa counties.
- Services are provided from offices located in Cedar Rapids, Council Bluffs, Davenport, Des Moines, Dubuque, Iowa City, Mason City, Ottumwa, Sioux City and Waterloo.
- Each Iowa Legal Aid office has a toll-free WATs line.
- Service is also available statewide to clients using English as a second language.

Services are planned to continue as before.

- Legal Services Corporation of Iowa and the Legal Aid Society of Polk County each provided essentially similar services, which will continue.
- Where differences did occur, Iowa Legal Aid will carry on local variations, such as Polk County's bankruptcy services and high-volume family law practice.

The same core group of experienced professionals will manage Iowa Legal Aid.

- Iowa Legal Aid will be governed by an 18 member Board of Directors composed of attorneys and client-eligible individuals, 12 of whom previously served on the board of the two legal aid entities.
- The vast majority of staff who were working with the predecessor organizations will continue to work for Iowa Legal Aid.

Iowa Legal Aid: Working for Fairness in Iowa

Iowa Legal Aid is a nonprofit organization that provides critical legal assistance to low-income Iowans who have nowhere else to turn.

Legal aid ensures the system works for those who cannot afford help with legal issues. Typical cases involve problems with basic necessities, fundamental rights or safety, including:

- Protecting victims of domestic violence
- Providing access to housing
- Securing income support such as disability benefits
- Consumer fraud

More than 22,200 cases were handled by legal aid in Iowa last year.

- More than 70 percent of the cases involved women as the primary client.
- Nearly 20 percent of the clients served were senior citizens.
- More than a third of the cases involved family law, the majority involving domestic abuse.
- Adding up the number of persons in the families served, more than 55,000 Iowans were helped by legal aid last year.

Legal aid solves problems before they become crises.

- When a client is saved from eviction, she doesn't become homeless.
- When a senior citizen calls the Legal Hotline for Older Iowans, she can get advice on consumer matters that can save her thousands of dollars.
- When a person in an abusive relationship gets assistance and support, she can move into a living environment that's safe for her and her children.

Iowa Legal Aid is a statewide program.

- Services are provided to residents of all 99 counties from offices in ten cities.
- Each office has a toll-free WATs line, and a new website was launched in early 2003.
- Nearly 2,700 volunteer attorneys provide free service valued at over \$1.5 million every year to clients referred by Iowa Legal Aid.

Legal aid cannot keep up with the demand.

- Between 650 and 750 Iowans who ask for assistance from legal aid are turned away each month because demand for help exceeds available resources.
- National statistics document that legal services programs can meet only about a quarter of the need.